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ABSTRACT

Given the increasing number and the complexity of the problems facing a school principal today, it is imperative that he be given all the help possible to aid him in making wise decisions. The application of the renewal process, as described in this document, provides the principal with shared problem solving and decision making machinery. This process was implemented at George Washington High School, New York City, during the 1975-76 academic year. Hampered by a teachers' strike during the first week of the term and a severe financial crisis throughout the year, the principal, assistant principals and department chairmen created a collaborative decision making structure that enabled them to meet several critical issues. The renewal process was first used to improve supervision training. The focus in this program was primarily upon techniques for observation and evaluation. Renewal was also utilized to improve school security. A questionnaire on security problems and possible solutions was issued to faculty, a security subcommittee was formed, and a conference was held to address the problem. As a result of decisions taken, school security underwent marked improvement in a short time. Finally, renewal was used to improve uniform final exams. A process similar to that described for the issue of security was undertaken. New procedures were adopted for implementation in the following school year. (Author/GC)

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A CASE HISTORY: Cabinet-Level Renewal at George Washington High School

written by
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U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Given the increasing number and complexity of the problems that face a principal today, it is imperative that he be given all the help possible to aid him in making the wisest decisions that he can. If that is to be done, what is necessary is the application of the Renewal process to provide him with shared problem-solving and decision-making machinery.

With a five-step sequence—staff involvement and diagnosis, planning, research, implementation and evaluation—as an operational framework, the principal can be in a position to deal most effectively with the wide array of problems and decisions that he faces at any given time during the school year.

Each of these steps is intimately tied to the others. Staff involvement and diagnosis require recognizing the problem and eliciting the support of those whose ideas and talents are best suited to helping resolve the issue. Diagnosis implies a need to assess the dimensions of the issue and research calls for exploration of all the facts available that are necessary for its resolution. Implementation involves developing a practicable plan of action for meeting the challenge that the decision or the problem represents. Evaluation is important in determining how efficacious the solution has been as well as whether or how it can be applied to future problems of this sort.

How the structure of such an approach was applied is evident in the experience of the cabinet at G.W.H.S. The principal, with the assistant principals and department chairmen, created a collaborative decision-making structure that helped them meet several critical issues during the course of one school year.

During the 1975-76 school year, with the New York City schools beleagured by a teachers' strike during the first week of the term and by a severe financial crisis throughout the year, there was a compelling need for a collaborative effort in meeting numerous and complex problems. Three examples of educational and administrative problems that were met through the medium of collaboration between the assistant principals and the principal are shown.

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Program 1: Use of Renewal to Improve Supervision Training

Phase	Activity	Time
Staff involvement and Diagnosis	Chairmen expressed the need for a closer working relationship with the principal on classroom observations and the overall supervision process	October 1975
Research	Various procedures for workable plans on supervision training were examined and considered	October - November 1975
Planning	The principal considered a new plan for observations and conferences with the chairmen	November 1975
Implementation	The principal and the chairmen executed the new plan	December 1975 - May 1976
Evaluation	The chairmen and the principal met to appraise and to improve the plan	June 1976

Summary: In October of 1975, several department chairmen expressed the need to work more closely with the principal on observation techniques. During the next two months, various approaches to the problem were considered by the principal and the cabinet. Among the various ideas given consideration were: a series of cabinet meetings devoted to the process of supervision in its various component parts; the preparation of a supervision check-list; a study of various observation reports; and the establishment of several cabinet sub-committees to deal with different aspects of supervision such as the conference, the observation, writing the report, and conducting department meetings. There was some dissatisfaction expressed by cabinet members because they felt that these activities were too abstract and too theoretical in nature.
A conversation between one of the chairmen and the principal led to the evolution of a cabinet-approved supervision training program.

The two had considered the use of a variation on the demonstration lesson for the process of supervision. The principal refined the ideas that emerged from that discussion into a four-phase observation-supervision program, one that involved the principal and the chairmen observing each other at work as supervisors. The first stage initiated in December, 1975, consisted of the principal watching each department chairman engaged in a pre-observation conference, observation and a post-observation conference followed by an evaluation of the chairman's work by the principal. When all the chairmen had been "observed" in this function by the principal, a plenary evaluation session was held so that all the ideas that had emerged during the first stage could be discussed. The second stage simply reversed the role of the principal and the chairmen in the process with the chairmen observing and evaluating the principal in his role as a supervisor. At a special cabinet meeting in June devoted to evaluating the first two stages, there was unanimous agreement that the experience had been a valuable one.

From that consensus emerged support for the principal's recommendation that the process be extended for another school year with the addition of two other stages. Those two stages were to consist of chairmen observing and evaluating each other at work and observing each other teaching demonstration lessons. Both stages are being implemented enthusiastically during the present school year with the endorsement of the entire cabinet.

Program 2: Use of Renewal to Improve School Security

Phase	Activity	Time
Staff Involvement and Diagnosis	The cabinet met to discuss security and listed it as a major problem area in the school.	February 10, 1976
Research	A questionnaire on security problems and possible solutions was issued to faculty.	February 15, 1976
Planning	A cabinet sub-committee on security was formed to review the data, to diagnose the problem, and to recommend possible solutions to the principal.	March 1, 1976
Implementation	The principal accepted the sub-committee's and the cabinet's recommendations and implemented emergency patrol procedures. A faculty conference devoted to the problem was also convened.	March 15, 1976
Evaluation	The cabinet met to appraise and to improve recommended security procedures.	March 15 - April 30, 1976

Summary: At one of the first cabinet meetings held in the spring term of 1976, several supervisors expressed strong convictions regarding the need to treat security as the school's primary problem. Within a week, a cabinet sub-committee of volunteers met to explore the nature of the problem and to consider it in its various ramifications and to recommend possible courses of action.

A simple, brief questionnaire was drafted by the sub-committee which had added students and teachers to its ranks. The fifteen-part, single-word-answer questionnaire covered what the respondent considered the thorniest parts of the problem: how and when teachers would try to help resolve the matter and what recommendations for solutions they could offer. A substantial number of responses emanated from the faculty. The information collated and distilled from that questionnaire gave the committee a basis for making recommendations to the principal.

Two basic recommendations emerged from the security sub-committee's deliberations. The members urged the principal to institute the first emergency faculty patrols at the school in five years. After considering the suggestion for a day while weighing the pro's and con's of such a move, the principal agreed to implement the recommendation. The patrols proved to be quite effective and school tone improved substantially. Having evaluated the impact of this first measure, the sub-committee followed up with its second recommendation that a permanent voluntary faculty patrol be established. To meet the problems of burdening teachers with too many patrols and assuring them of necessary support during their patrols, a schedule was designed whereby teachers would serve only one "free" period per week and they would walk in twos, accompanied by either an administrator, dean or security guard. A cabinet evaluation of the two recommendations and school tone established that the effects of those procedures had been quite salutary. School tone and security underwent marked improvement within a very short time span after their implementation.

Program 3: Use of Renewal to Improve Uniform Final Examinations

Phase	Activity	Time
Staff Involvement and Diagnosis	Chairmen expressed the need to establish common policy, philosophy, and guidelines related to uniform final examinations.	April 1, 1976
Research	Problems encountered by department chairmen in designing and administering uniform final examinations.	April 15, 1976
Planning	A cabinet sub-committee on uniform final examinations was formed to consider the various issues involved and to develop an operational report.	May 1976
Implementation	The sub-committee prepared a proposed set of uniform examination guidelines.	May 1976
Evaluation	The cabinet and the faculty are to assess the validity of the guidelines.	January 1977

Summary: Dissatisfaction had been expressed for several years by supervisors and the faculty regarding various educational and administrative aspects of uniform final examinations. The issue surfaced once again in April, 1976, when department chairmen were immersed in preparation of the uniform final examinations, scheduled for the second week in June.
The *leit-motif* of concern expressed to that testing procedure centered around developing common grading standards, training students for taking tests, writing and designing the test, and duplicating, storing and evaluating the examinations.

In early May, the uniform final examination sub-committee convened several times and developed a proposed set of uniform final examination guidelines. Among the various recommendations agreed upon were: that at least 20 percent of the examination be in essay form, 15 percent of it as a reading comprehension exercise; and that there be a balance of test material and questions which included information, skills and applications in short answer, sentence and essay form. The sub-committee's guidelines included meeting an urgent need to familiarize pupils in advance with the format and various question types and providing more formal instruction on test-taking and study techniques. Evaluation of the examinations was to be done both by grade committees and the department chairman in terms of a test's strengths and weaknesses, the improvements needed and an analysis of errors. Examinations are to count for 20 to 30 percent of the final grade and must be kept on file by the department chairmen for at least one year.

The proposed set of operational guidelines for the construction and use of uniform final examinations was then submitted to the full cabinet. It was scrutinized and examined in great detail with some slight modifications being introduced at the meeting. The guidelines were then adopted for implementation during the fall term of 1976 when preparations for the January, 1977, uniform final examinations are to take place. An evaluation of the new operational guidelines will be conducted in February, 1977, after the examinations have been written, administered and graded.